

HERTOG 2022 POLITICAL STUDIES PROGRAM

AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

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In this course, fellows will engage key texts that have helped shape the political idea – and political ideals – of America. Led by Professor Darren Staloff, fellows will reflect on the ideas of modern liberal democracy, exploring how the American system has sought to balance the deepest themes of ancient political thought against the imperatives of individual freedom, security, and economic progress that are so central to modern liberal thought. They will examine the relation of nature, reason, rights, and citizenship in forming the core of the American political ethos.

Course Materials:

- Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, eds. Clinton Rossiter and Charles Kesler
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop
- Course Reader

Resources:

To learn more about the ideas and figures discussed in this course, we encourage you to explore a project supported by the Hertog Foundation: **The Great Thinkers** (<http://thegreatthinkers.org/>) and **Contemporary Thinkers** (<http://contemporarythinkers.org/>) websites.

Relevant pages include [The Federalist](#), [John Locke](#), [Martin Diamond](#), [Harry Jaffa](#), and [Herbert Storing](#).

Monday, July 4, 2022

Happy Independence Day!

Tuesday, July 5, 2022

9:30 AM – 10:30 AM ET

Session I: Non-Liberal Republics

Readings:

- Plutarch, “Life of Lycurgus” (excerpts)
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. I, Part I, Ch. II., pp. 27–44

- Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (excerpts) and *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (excerpts)
- *Federalist* Nos. 1, 14, and 38 (excerpts)

Discussion Questions:

1. Would you like to live in Lycurgus's Sparta? In the colonial New England Puritan regime described by Tocqueville?
2. How do these systems differ from America's form of liberal democracy?

10:30 AM – 12:30 PM ET Theoretical Underpinnings of the American Republic

- David Hume, "Of the Original Compact," (excerpts, pp. 1–2, 7–8, 36–38, 46)
- John Locke, *Second Treatise on Government* (excerpts)
- United States Declaration of Independence
- Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Henry Lee, May 8, 1825 (excerpt)
- Thomas Jefferson, Letter to John Cartwright, June 5, 1824 (excerpt)
- Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Roger Weightman, June 24, 1826 (excerpt)

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the basis of the colonists' objections to the British government and rule prior to the Revolutionary War?
2. What do these authors mean when they refer to a state of nature and natural rights?
3. The ultimate ground or foundation to which the Declaration appeals is stated to be the Laws of Nature and Nature's God; what were the possible alternative foundations, as mentioned in the letter to John Cartwright? What are the implications of making "nature" the main foundation?
4. What does the Declaration mean by a natural right to liberty? By the truth that "all men are created equal"?

Wednesday, July 6, 2022

9:30 AM – 12:30 PM ET Session II: The Creation of the Constitution

Readings:

- *Federalist* Nos. 10 and 51
- Brutus, "Federal v. Consolidated Government" (excerpt)
- Centinel, No. 1 (excerpt)
- *Federalist* No. 23
- Herbert Storing, Ch. 3, *What the Anti-Federalists Were For* (1981)
- *Federalist* No. 63
- Thomas Jefferson, Letter to James Madison, September 6, 1789 (excerpt)

Discussion Questions:

1. What type of citizen is necessary in the new republic? In what measure does this citizen need to possess virtue?
2. Why is the “extended republic” of the Constitution an innovation?
3. What were some of the main objections to the Constitution?
4. What were the Federalists’ chief arguments against the Articles of Confederation?
5. Why study the Anti-Federalists? Have the fears of the Anti-Federalists been borne out?
6. What are the purposes of the separation of powers? What particular qualities were sought from the Senate and from the presidency?
7. Is it a wise idea to “sunset” the Constitution every generation? What reasons does Jefferson give in favor of re-doing the Constitution every generation, and why does Madison oppose the plan? Whose position do you favor?

Thursday, July 7, 2022

9:30 AM – 12:30 PM ET

Session III: Lincoln

Readings:

- Abraham Lincoln, Address to the Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois, January 27, 1838 (excerpts)
- Stephen Douglas, Lincoln-Douglas Debates (excerpts)
- Abraham Lincoln, Lincoln-Douglas Debates (excerpts)
- Abraham Lincoln, Speech at Chicago, Illinois, July 10, 1858 (excerpt)
- Alexander Stephens, “Corner Stone” Speech, March 21, 1861 (excerpt)
- Abraham Lincoln:
 - Message to Congress, July 4, 1861 (excerpt)
 - Letter to Horace Greeley, August 22, 1862
 - Final Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863
 - Gettysburg Address, November 19, 1863
 - Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865
 - Letter to Governor Michael Hahn, March 13, 1864

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the direct and indirect consequences of mob rule, and how are they related to “the perpetuation of our political institutions”? According to Lincoln, who has the harder task in perpetuating the institutions—the revolutionary generation or the current generation?
2. What were the different positions of Lincoln and Douglas on the crisis of the 1850s? Does Lincoln’s claim that the meaning of the Declaration of Independence was at the center of the crisis make sense?
3. What were the different views of Lincoln and Douglas on the Declaration of Independence?

4. According to Lincoln, why is secession unconstitutional? Why is the suspension of *habeas corpus* constitutional?
5. How does Lincoln understand the relation between Union and Emancipation?
6. Before his election, Lincoln often stated that he had no intention, and no constitutional authority, to interfere with slavery in the states where it existed. How, then, did he come to issue the Emancipation Proclamation and how did he justify it?
7. How does Lincoln understand equality and freedom, the key terms of the American creed? Is there a difference between holding equality as a “self-evident truth” and regarding it as a “proposition” to which we must be dedicated? What is the “new birth of freedom,” and how does it relate to the original birth of the nation “conceived in liberty”?
8. Does the Second Inaugural read as a speech that you would have expected from the Abraham Lincoln of the 1850s? What “new” themes are found? What is Lincoln’s theology? What is the role of charity in political life?

Friday, July 8, 2022

9:30 AM – 12:30 PM ET

Session IV: *Democracy in America*

Readings:

- Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Introduction, pp. 3–8 (stop at the paragraph with “it can bestow”); pp. 12–15, beginning with the final paragraph on p. 12 (“Therefore, it is not only to satisfy...”)
 - The character of aristocracy, pp. 535–39, 234–35 (begin with “What do you ask of society”)
 - The varieties of regimes under the modern condition of “democracy”
 - Mild despotism, pp. 661–65, 671 (begin with “I shall finish”), 676
 - Omnipotence (or tyranny) of the majority, pp. 235–50
 - Single-person (or party) despotism, pp. 52–53
 - Liberal democracy (no further reading)
 - Four Maladies or dangerous tendencies of democracy and some antidotes
 - Egalitarianism (love of equality), pp. 479–82
 - “Individualism” (better defined as “privatism” or apathy), pp. 482–84, 486 (begin near bottom with “The Americans have combated individualism”), 492, 496–500
 - Materialism, pp. 506–8, 517–24
 - Fatalism, pp. 469–72, 425–26
 - The effects of democracy on sentiments and manners, pp. 399–400, 500–503, 506–8, 510–14, 517–24
 - The effects of democracy on the family and women, pp. 563–67 and 573–76

- The effects of democracy on thought (“intellectual movement”), pp. 403–10, 417–24, 425–28, 450–52

Discussion Questions:

1. How does Tocqueville use the word “democracy”? Be careful; it has a slightly different meaning than our normal use today.
2. What are the purposes of “political science” (p. 7)? What work is it supposed to do in the modern era?
3. What does Tocqueville mean by “aristocracy”? Is it just an inequality in wealth or income? How do aristocrats think and feel, and what do they value? Which “regime” – aristocracy or democracy – is preferable? Why?
4. What characterizes each type or kind of rule under the modern condition of democracy?
5. Define each malady and how it threatens liberty.
6. If these tendencies are as powerful as they sometimes seem, are the antidotes Tocqueville identifies strong enough to counteract them?
7. What is the doctrine of self-interest rightly understood? What are its strengths? Its limitations?
8. What does Tocqueville mean by greatness?
9. Tocqueville compares a radically individualist (or androgynous) conception of sexual equality with what he believes is a better understanding the Americans have. What are the elements of the American understanding of relations between the sexes? What does Tocqueville mean when he speaks of “the superiority of [America’s] women”? Has the ideal that he describes and endorses been refuted or decisively overturned by contemporary feminism or can one still make a case for the desirability or possibility of sexual difference as the foundation of family and community?
10. How far is it possible to explain or deduce thought and ideas from the social state of equality? What are the limitations of this approach, sometimes called “the sociology of knowledge”?
11. *Democracy in America* continually compares democracy and aristocracy. Is there anything we learn about aristocracy that is helpful in guiding life in a democratic age? In what way(s), if any, can aspects of aristocracy be “fit” into democracy?